

Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
SW. edge of town,  
at end of White St.  
Round Top  
Fayette County  
Texas

HABS No. TEX-3124

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TEX-3124

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

Location: At southwest edge of town, end of White Street,  
Round Top, Fayette County, Texas.  
Latitude: 30 03' 46" N Longitude: 96 41' 57" W

Present Owner: Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Round Top.

Present Occupant: Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

Present Use: For church services.

Statement of Significance: Services were conducted by the Lutheran (Evangelische) Church at Round Top soon after the settlement of the Germans in this area. On another site the first church was built about 1857. The present building, erected in 1866-67, is one of the earliest stone churches built in this section of the state, and it has been used for services continuously since its first dedication in 1866. The church was recorded as a Texas Historic Landmark in 1965.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. General History: As a part of the Stephen F. Austin Colony, James Winn acquired 4,428 acres in 1831; the present townsite was included in this tract. Named after early settlers, the town was known as Townsend; later it was renamed Round Top since the postmaster lived in a house with a round tower. Portions of Nassau farm were purchased by the Adelsverein, and settlement by German immigrants began 1845 to 1847; these settlers began buying up the local farms and the town lots. On November 10, 1851 the First Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Texas was organized in Houston. The following pastors served the Round Top community:

Philip Zizelmann, served La Grange and Round Top, 1851  
Johan Conrad Roehm, 1852  
Otto Haun, 1853-56

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J. G. Lieb, 1856-60 (first church was built)  
J. Adam Neuthard, 1861-67 (present church built)  
Jacob Graul, Sr., 1867-1900  
F. A. Bracher, 1902-07  
John W. Harder, 1907-16  
A. H. Falkenberg, 1916-26  
August Dziewas, 1926-28  
John Wendt, 1928-29  
Emil A. F. Hannemann, 1929-30  
Walter Kralik, 1930-48  
A. B. Weiss, 1948-57  
Otto Fehler, 1957-62  
Martin H. Obst, 1963-67  
Ronald Hasley, 1967--

2. Ownership of the Property: A part of the James Winn league acquired in 1831. In the 1850's it was owned by Hugh White and wife; sold January 19, 1857 to Charles P. Flack and Mrs. E. W. Flack. On October 12, 1865 the Bethlehem Lutheran Church purchased 2.03 acres on which the church is now located (recorded January 3, 1870). Later additional property was acquired. The present enclosed churchyard and cemetery is about 1.05 acres in size.
3. Construction of the Church: Under the leadership of Pastor J. Adam Neuthard, construction began in 1866; the cornerstone was laid May 6th of that year and there was a dedication service on October 28. The first formal organized service was held on January 13, 1867. Stone for the masonry walls was quarried nearby on the hillside; timbers for the framing was cut from cedar trees in the neighborhood.
4. Plans, Construction Notes: No original plans are known to exist. Account books give the original cost as \$2,400. A greater portion of the cost was collected at the time by free-will offerings; by 1873 all debts of the church were paid off.
5. The Builder: The designer and head mason was Carl Siegis-mund Bauer. He was born September 14, 1792 at Annaberg, Saxony, Germany, and was trained there as a mason. He came to Texas with his family on the ship NEPTUNE in 1848 and settled in Fayette County. In the 1850's he built a

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two-story stone house for Conrad Schuddemagen at Round Top. On the construction of the church, his son, Carl Traugott Bauer, worked on the masonry, and another son, Carl Ehrgott Bauer, did the carpentry work. William Froehner was an apprentice stone mason, and J. Schuddemagen did plastering. The elder Bauer died January 27, 1873 and was buried in the Bethlehem Lutheran Church cemetery.

The organ was designed and built by Johann Traugott Wantke. He was born in 1808 at Schlusien in Prussia and he was trained as a cabinet maker and organ builder. He arrived in Texas in 1857 and first lived near La Grange but moved to Round Top before 1863. He built seven pipe organs for Texas churches; one is now in the Sophienburg Memorial Museum at New Braunfels, Texas.

6. Alterations and Additions: To strengthen the exterior side walls, iron tie rods were added in 1873 and in 1880. Four massive stone buttresses were added in 1881-82 to strengthen the southwest wall of the church. In 1894 flooring of red cedar was put down to replace the stone flagging. Except for the above changes and minor repairs, the church stands today little modified from its original design.

B. Bibliography:

Geue, Ethel Hander, New Homes In A New Land, German Immigration To Texas 1847-1861, Waco, Texas: The Texian Press, 1970.

Our God Is Marching On, A Centennial History of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Round Top, Texas, Austin, Texas: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1966.

Webb, Walter P. and H. Bailey Carroll, Editors, Handbook of Texas, 2 vols., Austin, Texas: The Texas State Historical Society, 1952.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: It is one of the earliest stone churches built in this section of the state. Constructed by German-born craftsmen, its well-proportioned form and simple design reflects the character of the Lutheran churches of the original homeland of these settlers.
2. Condition of the Fabric: Within a decade after its construction, the exterior masonry wall on the southwest side began cracking, and remedial action was taken. There is now some evidence of settling, and engineering investigation is scheduled. Otherwise, the building is in good condition.

B. Technical Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: A rectangular plan, 30 feet, 6 inches by 55 feet, with a bell tower over the entrance.
2. Foundations: The mortared stonework extends down to ledges of loose sandstone, but these ledges are apparently not adequate to support the massive masonry walls.
3. Wall Construction: Exterior walls, 24" in thickness, are of ledge sandstone that was quarried in the cemetery areas nearby. Walls are plastered inside and out and are painted white. Apparently due to the cracking of the wall on the southwest side, five transverse tie-rods and two longitudinal rods were put in place (1873-80). Later (1881-82) the massive stone buttresses were added. In recent years cracks have appeared and there are now tentative plans to do repair work.
4. Chimney: A brick chimney above the southwest wall extends six feet above the roof. It formerly served a wood-fired stove.

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5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and Doors: The front (southwest) entrance is a double door, each with two panels. Above the doorway there is a narrow seven-light transom. The rear entrance is a single door, plank type.
- b. Windows: Double-hung windows are used throughout. Side windows are paired, large, original six-lights each sash. Interior heads have segmented arch form.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape: A ridge roof, 8 1/4 in 12 pitch, with rear jerkinhead. It is covered with wood shingles.
- b. Framing: Rough-sawn rafters are 5" x 7", spaced 30" on center. A tie-beam with fillers forms a barrellike structure to which the wood ceiling is nailed.
- c. Cornice: The eaves project about 12"; the face and underside of the extending rafters are boxed in. Gutters and downspouts are of sheetmetal.

- 7. Bell tower: It is framed of heavy timbers, mortised and pinned in the traditional manner. On each of the four sides there are two wood louvers, 18" x 36" in size. The tower roof is pyramidal, 17 1/2 in 12 pitch, it is surmounted with a 12" diameter sphere and topped with a metal cross. In the bell loft there are two bells. The smaller bell was given by Pastor Neuthard; soon after the church was built Mr. Stephen Pochmann donated \$55.00 for the purchase of the larger bell.

C. Technical Description of the Interiors:

- 1. Floor plans: There is a small front entrance vestibule with a stair to the organ loft. The chancel end of the rectangular sanctuary is a raised (8") platform. In the center, near the rear wall the altarpiece sits on another small platform. Until early in this century the pulpit was placed high above the altar. The altar was modified and the pulpit is now to the left side of the chancel.

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Above the entrance vestibule is the space for the organ and the choir.

2. Flooring: Early photographs show that the floor was large, squared flagstones. The entire space, sanctuary and vestibule, is now floored with red cedar, varnish finish. This wood flooring was first put down in 1894; the present flooring was recently placed.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Masonry walls are plastered, painted white. The barrel-like wood ceiling is painted gray. Other woodwork is painted dark brown.
4. Trim: In most areas the interior is quite plain with few decorative features. At the base of the vaulted ceiling there is a large cyma-reversa type moulding, painted brown. Over the openings to the organ-choir loft there is a similar moulding.
5. Pipe Organ: An outstanding feature of the church is the fine quality organ with its pipes constructed of red cedar. Soon after the completion of the church, the organ builder, Traugott Wantke, presented it as a gift. In recent years the organ has been overhauled and it is now in excellent condition. Among other improvements, an electric motor was installed to supplement the hand-operated pump.
6. Hardware: On the front door there is a large cast-iron box-type door lock. A similar, somewhat smaller lock is on the rear door.
7. Lighting: There is no evidence of an early lighting system. The church is now lighted by electricity.
8. Heating: Until recent decades the church was heated with a wood-fired iron stove that was located near the southwest wall. The brick chimney is still in place above the roof. There is now a butane-fired space heater installed in the organ loft.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The church is located at the southwest edge of the town; it is pleasantly situated on the brow of a low hill. Great spreading

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live oaks are in the area and cedars have been planted along the cemetery driveway. The original site (1865) had approximately 2.03 acres; more land has been acquired since that date. The present church yard and cemetery occupy about 1.05 acres.

2. Walls, walks and paving: The three sides of the cemetery are enclosed with a well-constructed dry wall of ledge sandstone, about 15" to 18" in width and about three feet in height; a wall was built along the northeast side of the cemetery, but in recent decades this was removed and a concrete curb was built along the street. Within the cemetery the sloping natural terrain was terraced with a stone retaining wall and recently a parallel stone retaining wall was built to form a terrace near the church building. At the front entrance of the church there is an area paved with large squared sandstone flagging; portions have been covered with concrete. At the rear and in the cemetery there are walks of irregularly shaped stone flagging.

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